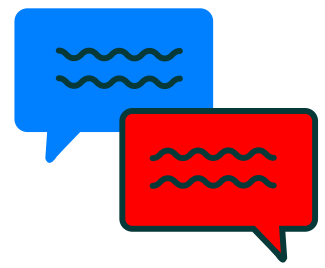


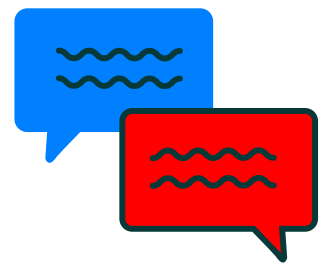
SETTING GUIDELINES FOR DIALOGUE



While in regular everyday interactions “guideline” setting should probably be a more informal process, it can be helpful to be aware of your own broader set of values, expectations, and priorities going into difficult conversations. Below are some suggested guidelines for your own review and reflection as you think about approaching discussions about contentious issues.

- Honor the dignity of every person in the conversation**—we communicate and learn best when we feel respected as a person.
- Set realistic goals and expectations**—constructive dialogue across difference cannot happen when we are trying to convince others, fix things, or resolve differences. These conversations are most constructive when the goals are to build relationship, to come to better understanding of different viewpoints, and to learn more about yourself and others.
- Be as present as possible**—You don’t have to be perfect, and you don’t have to be comfortable or certain about anything. But showing up fully and with honesty enables a different level of sharing and listening.
- Share your own thoughts and feelings using “I” statements**—Avoid making statements about what you think others are thinking or feeling, and avoid interrupting, correcting, or arguing as others speak.
- Invest in the constructive potential of difference—and even conflict.** Recognize conversation as an opportunity to learn more about how other people see the world, to refine and communicate your own viewpoints, to be exposed to new ways of looking at the world, to deepen relationships, and to inform how you interact with each other and the world.
- Remember that relationships don’t require agreement/disentangle relationship from agreement**—relationships require mutual respect.
- Allow the development of relationships to take the time that they take**—Building trust takes time, and trusting relationships offer an important “container” for hard conversations.
- Be open to listening to and learning from your emotional reactions, and don’t blindly trust what they tell you to do**—It’s natural to be uncomfortable in, and our emotions can be important sources of information about our needs and values, but negative emotions can often lead us to behave in ways that shut down relationship and dialogue.

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- Honor the power of language**—and be ready to clarify and define shared terms, or to identify “hot button” terms that are too loaded to be used constructively.
- Get curious, and lead with questions**—When we ask each other open, non-leading questions that we genuinely don’t know the answer to, we can get at deeper levels of sharing and understanding. Also be willing to ask yourself hard questions—what did I mean by that? Why?
- Seek to understand one another’s stories and narratives**—stories of who we are and how our identities were formed can be rich and open new pathways for dialogue in ways that simple identity labels or statements of positions are not.
- Hold space for paradox**—sometimes ideas or emotions that seem fundamentally opposed can be true at the same time. We can believe an idea deeply and still see its limitations, and we can hold deeply positive and negative feelings about one another at the same time. Allowing this to be true expands our capacity for listening and for empathizing with ourselves and others.
- Be open to being surprised**—We often have firmly set expectations when we engage in difficult dialogues that can make us less receptive to new information or perspectives. Enter the conversation with a willingness to be surprised.
- Adhere to standards of respectful confidentiality**—In conversations on difficult issues, we often feel exposed and unsafe—to enable honest and constructive conversation, it is important that everyone know that what they say is shared only with people they choose to share with.